

MORAL INCURABLES.

From the London Saturday Review.
A recent traveller in the islands of the Indian Archipelago has, among other things, given a rather minute account of the condition to which the Malay opium-smoker reduces himself; and the account is made more graphic than unaided words could have made it by a photograph of one of these unhappy creatures. The wretched though only of middle age, is emaciated so as to be mere skin and bone; the deadness of his expression is irreproducible in words; in his hands is the fatal pipe; "by his side are seen vessels for making tea, and by copious draughts of that stimulant he will try to revive his dead limbs by and by, when he awakes from his contemplated debauch, and finds, as it were, his very life on the point of leaving the body."

When a man has once contracted the habit of opium-smoking, says the traveller, it is impossible to reform; and, in fact, one need only look at the picture to be quite sure of this impossibility. A reader with anything like an imaginative turn of mind can hardly help pausing to think of a condition of such despair; and if he is reflective as well as imaginative, he will feel a chill in remembering that the Malay opium-smoker is not the only, even if he is the most degraded, kind of incurable. It is rather a useful thing for Englishmen to think about, because the notion of an incurable is one of those which we have supreme difficulty in admitting to our minds. We are so convinced—and it is a very decided piece of good fortune for us that we are so—the omnipotence of personal effort, and the irresistibility of the human will, that the existence of facts which effort cannot touch, and of circumstances against which any force that we think of can do nothing, is a shock. It is better that people should overrate than that they should underrate the power of the will, and that they should narrow the field where effort is unavoidable to as small dimensions as may be. Even if they devote their energies to the reformation of characters that are too far gone in evil to be capable of reformation, at any rate the efforts bring good to the worker, and brace his own character if it does nothing else. But it is also true that we should shut our eyes to the existence of whole bands of moral incurables—as far beyond redemption from this or that tyrannical habit as the Malay opium-smoker, and whose moral case is not a whit less desperate. Our common reluctance to recognize such a class of persons arises not merely from the shock which they give to our conviction of the omnipotence of energy and will, but also from the shock which they give to our compassion and sympathy and human hopelessness. There is a certain horror, as of death itself, in the idea that anybody, especially anybody we know or like, could really, in the depths of his mind, either on one special side of conduct, or, as is sometimes true, on all sides. Hopelessness is the one condition which it freezes the sympathetic mind even to dream about in connection with character. Yet in one sense hopelessness may almost be said to be a law of character; that is to say, we get into moral grooves, and we only go sufficiently far in them, thenceforward it is as good as certain that we shall never succeed in getting out again. But it is also true that we should shrink, and it is a good, therefore, that we should shut our eyes to the existence of whole bands of moral incurables—men as far beyond redemption from this or that tyrannical habit as the Malay opium-smoker, and whose moral case is not a whit less desperate. Our common reluctance to recognize such a class of persons arises not merely from the shock which they give to our conviction of the omnipotence of energy and will, but also from the shock which they give to our compassion and sympathy and human hopelessness. There is a certain horror, as of death itself, in the idea that anybody, especially anybody we know or like, could really, in the depths of his mind, either on one special side of conduct, or, as is sometimes true, on all sides. Hopelessness is the one condition which it freezes the sympathetic mind even to dream about in connection with character. Yet in one sense hopelessness may almost be said to be a law of character; that is to say, we get into moral grooves, and we only go sufficiently far in them, thenceforward it is as good as certain that we shall never succeed in getting out again.

Whether he does or not, however, it is very transparent that every hour of his life a man is building up habits and cutting off retreats for himself. Yet there are not many persons who have either thought so much about conduct in general, or have kept so alert an eye upon their own conduct in particular, as to know when the time has come, or is just at hand, that retreat will have ceased to be open to them—when they are in their respect or trust, or in all respects, incurable and hopeless. In the greater matters of conduct, naturally, men are not so easily led into the way of sin in the straight track of what is honorable, virtuous, and wholesome. But smaller matters often make all the difference, and it is in foibles, weaknesses, littlenesses, that men are apt to fall away, and to let in ingratitude in them, without being at all aware of the total impossibility of ever undoing that which is at the moment quietly and tenaciously doing itself. Only those who have taken the pains to watch the process of the formation of habits in themselves and in others know how comparatively few moments it is often required to sink irreparably into their nature.

EDWARD G. FLETHER, Esq., No. 18 WALNUT Street, Philadelphia.

JOHN E. COLEMAN, Attorney for Libelant.

118mws*

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS FOR THE CITY AND COUNTY OF PHILADELPHIA.

ESTATE OF HENRY KENNEDY, deceased.

The Auditor appointed by the Court to audit, settle and adjust the account of H. K. KENNEDY, deceased, in the estate of the Estate of William F. KENNEDY,

Esq., No. 18 WALNUT Street, in the City of Philadelph.

118mws*

IN THE ORPHANS' COURT FOR THE CITY AND COUNTY OF PHILADELPHIA.

ESTATE OF WILLIAM FLEMING, deceased.

The Auditor appointed by the Court to audit, settle and adjust the account of H. K. KENNEDY,

deceased, in the estate of William F. KENNEDY,

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ESTATE OF ELEANOR WRIGHT, deceased.

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